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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000900

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TAGS: MOPS MARR PGOV PREL PTER SY IZ

SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY (REFTEL): MCNS MARCH 16 DISCUSSES
BASRAH SECURITY, TAJI MAINTENANCE FACILITY, DEMINING

REF: BAGHDAD 00799

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (U) The March 16 Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) focused on dealing with security in Umm Qasr port and Basrah Province, implementation of the 2008 budget, and mine action. MNF-I briefed on the now operational Taji Maintenance Facility. End Summary.

Umm Qasr/Basrah Security

¶2. (C REL MNF-I) Prime Minister Maliki opened the meeting with expressions of deep concern over the worrisome security situation at the port of Umm Qasr and throughout the province of Basra. He expressed alarm that the situation could get out of hand, creating a problem in Basra worse than that in Mosul, Ninewa.

¶3. (C REL MNF-I) Minister of State for National Security (MSNS) Waeli echoed Maliki's concerns, noting that daily situation reports coming into his office indicate up to 20 killings daily. The professional class - doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers - is fleeing the province, creating a downward spiral in social stability, he added. When Minister of Interior Bolani intervened that the police had mounted an operation against some gangs there, Waeli responded that the gangs there were more powerful than the police.

¶4. (S REL MNF-I) Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, who had recently visited Umm Qasr and Basrah, joined the chorus, restating and expanding on the recommendations for port security he had given to the Ambassador on March 13 (reftel).

He noted that Basrah Operations commander General Mohan had told him that a brigade drawn from outside Basrah was needed.

He pointed out that Mohan had a plan to take control of security in Basrah and was discussing with MNF-I's LTG Dubik how to implement the plan. Bolani interjected that the plan had three phases and would take some time to implement.

(Note: General Mohan had already presented this plan to GEN Petraeus and his staff. LTG Dubik is in charge of a special working group to design a coordinated MNF-I response to support Mohan's efforts. End Note.) Later in the meeting, D/PM Salih added that the problem was quite serious and that outside help (not further specified) would be needed to restore security to the port and the province.

¶5. (C REL MNF-I) DCG LTG Rollo observed that just as the MCNS had agreed on the need for a comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy in Mosul, Ninewa, the same must apply in Basrah - a cross-ministerial security, economic and

social development plan must be formulated. The working group planning support for Mohan's plan meet on Friday to prepare its report, which should then be briefed to MCNS on Sunday, March 23. Later in the meeting he reminded the committee that the port of Umm Qasr must be brought up to international standards of security and operations. Failure to meet those standards was costing Iraq greatly in higher fees and insurance costs. Just as for BIAP, international help would be required. The plan for security at Umm Qasr needed to be integrated into the overall Basra Security plan.

¶ 16. (C REL MNF-I) The PM stated that he would go to Basrah to show the people of southern Iraq that they were part of the country and that the central government would act for their security. National Security Advisor (NSA) Muwaffaq al-Rubaie noted that the Minister of Defense and other ministers had been there recently. He suggested to the PM that he should delay travel until after the Friday and Sunday meetings LTG Rollo had suggested. The Friday meeting would be an opportunity to unify understanding of the problem, noting that while Mosul, Ninewa had a terrorist and insurgency problem, Basrah had an organized crime problem. A formal presentation to the March 23 MCNS could then be made, after which the PM could travel to Umm Qasr and Basrah fully-briefed on the situation. Maliki indicated his agreement with Rubaies's plan. Rubaie also applauded the efforts of General Mohan and GEN Petraeus thus far, noting that MOI's efforts deserved praise too.

Budget Implementation

¶ 17. (C REL MNF-I) Turning to the budget, the PM asked Minister of Finance Bayan Jabr if money was being released. Jabr

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replied that the budget was still at the Ministry of Justice; funds could not be released until the budget was published in the Government Gazette. It should be published no later than Thursday, March 20. Jabr then outlined his plans to present to the MCNS, and then later publicly, execution of the budget. He wishes to make such presentations every two months and hopes it will put public pressure on line ministries and provincial officials to execute their budget allotments. MSNS Waeli protested that every two months was too frequent, suggesting every three months instead. After some discussion of the frequency of public presentations, it was left to the Ministry of Finance to determine the most reasonable frequency for public reports. (Note: We heard the next day at a Deputy/MCNS meeting that the Ministry of Finance continues to want public presentations of budget execution every two months. End Note.)

Mine Action

¶ 18. (C REL MNF-I) Minister of Environment Narmin Othmann gave a thorough and detailed briefing on the mine problem facing Iraq. She noted that it is estimated that there are 25 million mines throughout Iraq, most from the 1980's Iran-Iraq war. These mines make many thousands of hectares of arable land unusable for agriculture or other purposes, are a source of explosive material for terrorists and criminals, and, most tragically, injure thousands of victims each year. Deputy NSA Rasul Safaa endorsed these comments, noting that Iraq had over 200,000 mine victims, many of them children.

¶ 19. (C REL MNF-I) MOI Bolani observed that while the mine problem presented very little threat to national security, its human cost was substantial. He suggested a special committee be formed to establish a policy on mines. Othmann noted that Iraq was now a signatory of the Ottawa Convention and must pass legislation to conform with the treaty. (Note: Embassy Sr. Mine Action coordinator had met earlier in the week with Othmann and presented her with model legislation. He will continue to assist her and the Iraqi Mine Action committee. End Note.)

¶10. (C REL MNF-I) Othmann made it clear that she was willing to take responsibility for formulating Iraq's compliance with the Ottawa Treaty and drawing up a mine policy. She only asked for support in identifying and hiring competent personnel, and insisted that she not be forced to accept former Mine Action committee personnel from the Ministry of Planning, where the commission had been located previously. Foreign Minister Zebari seconded this notion, observing that Planning had been filled with corrupt officials. Given the foreign assistance needed for effective demining, Iraq could not afford a mine action agency identified as corrupt. He added that the UNDP, the UK, and international NGO's would assist Iraq. British Deputy Chief of Mission Tucknott interjected that the UK would be willing to help with demining, and put Othmann in touch with relevant UK-based NGOs.

¶11. (C REL MNF-I) Responding to D/NSA Safaa's and GOI spokesman Ali Dabbagh's observations that a commission to coordinate the inter-agency efforts would be needed, Othmann reiterated her readiness to oversee the Mine Action commission. She noted that highly trained personnel employed by NGOs usually did the work of mine awareness education, identification of mined areas, removal of mines, etc. Funds for the NGOs could come from a special account or from each ministry, for example, when it had a specific project requiring mine action. She noted that the NGO IMCO would soon be established as an Iraqi company, and had the expertise and experience needed for demining operations, repeating her remark that mine removal was a highly specialized skill.

¶12. (C REL MNF-I) PM Maliki asked her what she needed. She replied she needed cooperation from the other ministries and funds to pay for new staff and hiring specialized NGOs. In closing, she noted that she had met with Embassy's mine action coordinator earlier that week.

Taji Presentation

¶13. (C REL MNF-I) MNF-I gave a brief report on the successful rehabilitation and start-up of the Taji Maintenance facility, which will maintain, service, repair, and refurbish, as needed, the wheeled armored vehicles for the Iraqi Security Forces. NSA Rubaie noted that this was of vital importance, reminding the committee that this facility, in Iraq, would refurbish the

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8,000 up-armored HMMWVs earmarked for transfer to the Iraqi Army. He also observed that this facility was providing Iraqi workers with highly prized skills and training. Those workers would be responsible for the continued maintenance and servicing of the refurbished HMMWVs.

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